

4-1-1979

## What Administrators Actually Know About Reading Programs

Martha Rapp Haggard  
*Northern Illinois University*

Jane Warren Meeks  
*Old Dominion University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons)



Part of the Education Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Haggard, M. R., & Meeks, J. W. (1979). What Administrators Actually Know About Reading Programs. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 19 (3). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol19/iss3/4](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol19/iss3/4)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).

# WHAT ADMINISTRATORS ACTUALLY KNOW ABOUT READING PROGRAMS

*Martha Rapp Haggard*

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

*Jane Warren Meeks*

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this survey was to determine the extent and depth of public school administrators' attitudes, knowledge and concepts about reading programs. Surveys were sent to 100 public school administrators in a mid-western metropolitan area. The results were tabulated from fifty-nine respondents; six superintendents, twenty-one secondary principals, and thirty-two elementary principals. No special supervisors (language arts curriculum, personnel, etc.) were included in the study.

## Personnel

The personnel section was positioned first in the survey because the investigators felt that reading programs must be discussed primarily in terms of people. The focus here was not on existing situations, but on what the administrators felt to be ideal for their particular school or system.

IDEALLY, HOW MANY READING PERSONNEL WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE IN YOUR DISTRICT OR SCHOOL? HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE IN THIS DISTRICT OR SCHOOL?

It was expected that this question would yield a teacher-student ratio which would indicate the ideal scope of the reading program as seen by administrators. It was deliberately worded to read "reading personnel" rather than "reading specialists" or "reading teachers" in an attempt to avoid limiting responses to only one portion of reading programs.

## Teacher-Student Ratio

	1:75- 1:100	1:101- 1:200	1:201- 1:300	1:301- 1:500	1:501- 1:1000	1:1001- 1:2000 +
<i>Supt.</i>	0	0	1	4	1	0
<i>Sec. Prin.</i>	2	6	3	1	4	3
<i>Ele. Prin.</i>	3	6	7	9	5	1

Two conclusions could be drawn from these rather discouraging ratios. First, the term "reading personnel" may not have been, in fact, as unbiased as had been expected. It may have directed the thinking of administrators toward traditionally accepted remedial reading or small-scale developmental programs, thereby deceiving, to some extent, the people being surveyed. This may explain the 0:1300 ratio given by one secondary principal. However, the other conclusion could be that no misin-

terpretation occurred; that administrators really do equate "reading personnel" with "reading teacher," and that they do not perceive a need for all teachers to be proficient in teaching reading. Three exceptions did occur. One elementary principal commented that all of his teachers were reading personnel, and another indicated an ideal ratio of 1:15. One secondary principal stated that the entire English department should be reading personnel.

#### WHAT LEVEL OF EDUCATION WOULD YOU LIKE THE READING SPECIALISTS TO HAVE?

This question was constructed to direct the administrators' attention to reading specialists and to determine whether or not they felt that level of education is related to teaching competency.

Of the fifty-nine administrators, forty-four felt that reading specialists should have a Master's Degree in reading. Nine indicated that post-graduate courses should be required; however, four responded that state certification was adequate, and two felt that only a B.S. Degree was necessary.

#### HOW MANY HOURS IN READING SHOULD THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS HAVE?

Superintendents felt that classroom teachers should have a minimum of nine hours. Secondary principals indicated that six to nine hours would be adequate; however, one secondary administrator expressed a desire that teachers have fifteen hours in reading, and another specifically stated that he would prefer English teachers alone to receive nine hours of course work in this field. This could be compared with the two high school principals who indicates that no hours in reading were necessary. Over half of the elementary principals indicated that a minimum of twelve hours should be required for classroom teachers, and thirteen of those desired certification. As a group, elementary principals had considerably higher reading education requirements for teachers than superintendents or secondary principals.

#### WHAT TEACHING EXPERIENCE WOULD YOU LIKE THE READING SPECIALISTS TO HAVE?

Classroom teaching experience was felt by almost all administrators to be important. The average length of teaching desired ranged from two to five years; however, one superintendent indicated that the experience should include varying age and grade levels. Three secondary principals wanted the reading specialist to have elementary experience. The administrators, then, overwhelmingly agreed that classroom teaching is a prerequisite to successful performance as a reading specialist.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK THE JOB OF THE READING SPECIALISTS SHOULD BE? THAT IS WHERE SHOULD HIS OR HER EMPHASIS BE?

The superintendents' responses were fairly evenly distributed over the three major areas. One superintendent commented that the reading specialist's role as resource person depended on the individual's rapport with teachers. Secondary principals indicated emphasis should be placed on

teaching remedial classes and functioning as a resource person. One principal commented that the specialist should work with above average groups. The elementary principals also felt that the job priority of the reading specialist should be remedial teaching and resource person. Only half responded that emphasis should be placed on testing. Comments made by elementary principals indicated that the reading specialist should establish the reading program, combine developmental and remedial teaching where the need arises, diagnose and relay practical information in order to establish remediation programs within the classroom, and work in a team situation with the classroom teachers. This, along with the many multiple responses, led to the conclusion that the general trend of administrators was to view the reading specialist as a sort of "person for all seasons."

### *Job of Reading Specialists*

	Testing	Teaching		Resource	Other
		Dev.	Rem.	Resource	
Supt.	3	2	4	3	1
Sec. Prin.	6	7	13	12	1
Ele. Prin.	11	4	18	23	7

### Content

The question to be answered by the content section of the survey was, How do administrators define "program"? It was felt that responses such as "SRA" or "Scott Foresman" would indicate a rather narrow concept of what constitutes a reading program. The emphasis here was on existing situations rather than desired ones.

### WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE READING PROGRAM IN THIS SCHOOL?

An attempt was made to categorize most widely recognized components. It was assumed that single responses would limit the scope to a specific area, while multiple responses would indicate increased depth and flexibility throughout the program.

### *Comments of Reading Program*

	Basal	Dev.		Remedial		
	Series	Reading	Hardware	Reading	Library	Other
Supt.	5	3	3	5	3	6
Sec. Prin.	3	6	4	14	11	7
Ele. Prin.	31	14	19	17	20	10

Interestingly, it was the additional comments that yielded the most insight into administrators' views of the reading program. Superintendents added such components as parents, counselors, classroom teachers, learning disability teachers, diagnosis, "everything we do," and "the best teaching device is a good teacher." Each one of these suggest that

superintendents rank quality staff as being the most important component of the reading program. Secondary principals stated that remedial reading and library facilities comprised the reading program in high schools. Three principals noted the classroom teacher as the core of the reading program; one principal named "Paperback Power" as the only component; and two had no idea what question was being asked. The basal reading series were the primary response by almost all elementary principals, supplemented by many of the other components. The most heartening response was the number of administrators who considered the library facilities to be an integral part of the reading program.

#### TO WHAT GRADE LEVEL DOES THE READING PROGRAM EXTEND?

Traditionally, systematic reading instruction has terminated at the end of elementary school and has not been considered to be a concern of secondary school curricula. This question was asked to determine whether or not administrators are holding with tradition in the face of contrary in-school and research evidence.

##### *Grade Level*

	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve	Other
Supt.	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	0
Sec. Prin.	1	3	4	5	2	2	3	2
Ele. Prin.	25	0	4	0	0	0	0	3

Superintendents and secondary principals indicated that reading programs extend through grade twelve; however, when this answer is compared with personnel responses, it seems reasonable to conclude that they meant that *remedial reading* programs were available through grade twelve. Elementary principals felt that the formal reading program terminated at grade six, even though one stated that, "Reading isn't taught above second grade—beyond that, it's just going through the motions."

##### *Evaluation*

Since evaluation must be an initial and continuous consideration for any school program, it was felt that administrative knowledge of evaluative procedures in reading would determine their awareness of instructional needs, not only for the individual, but for the total program as well.

#### WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MAIN GOAL OF THE READING PROGRAM IN THIS DISTRICT?

Because goal-stating is important to the implementation of any program, this was considered one of the key questions in the survey: the desired end directly affects that which is actually produced.

One of the most striking observations which can be made about the answers to this question is that one-half of the total responses were in the "reading independence" and "other" categories. Especially interesting were the "other" comments which heavily emphasized such goals as "successful functioning in society," enjoyment, happiness, love of reading and gaining in self confidence.

*Goal of Reading Program*

	Functional Literacy	Reading Gr. Level	Reading Maturity	Reading Independence	Reading Other
Supt.	2	0	1	1	4
Sec. Prin.	5	6	5	5	5
Ele. Prin.	4	8	6	10	11

## WHAT METHODS SHOULD BE USED TO EVALUATE THE ATTAINMENT OF THAT GOAL?

This question was used to discover whether or not the methods of evaluation were commensurate with the stated goals.

*Methods of Evaluation*

	Observation	Ach. Tests	Survey Tests	Skill Tests	Diag. Tests	Basal Tests	Inform. Survey
Supt.	1	2	0	1	0	0	2
Sec. Prin.	8	7	1	2	2	2	1
Ele. Prin.	12	21	2	3	5	6	8

Classroom observation and achievement tests received fifty-one of the eighty-six responses, with achievement tests showing a slight lead. Three superintendents suggested using library circulation as one means of evaluation; however, two superintendents called for the use of intelligence tests. Surveying graduates, watching the drop-out rates, talking to the child, and evaluating school performance comprised most of the additional comments. These methods seemed, with the exception of intelligence tests scores, to adequately evaluate the stated goals.

## TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE COORDINATION OF READING INSTRUCTION THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL SYSTEM?

Including this question in the evaluation section of the survey was done with the assumption that greater coordination would, among other things, increase communication between personnel concerning such basic questions as, What are the goals? How will they be attained? and How will they be evaluated? It then, represents a means for self evaluation by the people responsible for implementation of the program.

*Coordination of Reading Program*

	Comm. Teachers	Ind. Meetings	Sporadic Meetings	Reg. Sch. Meetings	Inservice Training	Reading Coor.
Supt.	0	1	0	1	4	
Sec. Prin.	6	2	1	6	7	
Ele. Prin.	7	6	2	5	18	

A surprising number of administrators indicated that their programs were guided by a reading coordinator. This had not been anticipated, but is perhaps an encouraging trend. A little discouraging were the number of "communication between individual teachers" responses combined with

such comments as, "no coordination of texts," "very little," and two "no answer" responses.

IS A SYSTEM-WIDE TESTING PROGRAM UTILIZED TO MEASURE GROWTH AND DEFICIENCY OF READING LEVEL? IF SO, WHAT SPECIFIC TESTS ARE USED?

This question was used to ascertain whether testing was considered important in assessing reading progress, and to determine the most popular tests.

	<i>Test Used</i>						
	Yes	No	Don't Know	ITBS	CTBS	Stan. Ach.	Other
Supt.	4	2	0	2	2	1	1
Sec. Prin.	16	5	5	5	2	1	3
Ele. Prin.	29	3	0	22	0	1	6

An overwhelming majority of administrators indicated that system-wide testing programs did exist; however, five secondary principals did not know what tests were used. The *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* was named by twenty-nine administrators as the test used, which may or may not be explainable in terms of regional preference.

#### Priorities

The final section of the survey was based on the investigators' beliefs that, in schools, priorities are demonstrated mainly by three things. First, and probably most critical, is the amount of money a district is willing to spend for a program. Second is the amount of time allowed for instruction, and third is the degree to which inservice training programs are underwritten by the district.

ARE THERE PROVISIONS MADE FOR INSERVICE TRAINING IN THE AREA OF READING AT ALL LEVELS?

Since inservice training involves released teacher time and/or payment for attendance, it was felt that provisions for such programs would partially indicate the importance attached to reading instruction.

	YES	NO	OTHER
Supt.	4	1	0
Sec. Prin.	10	10	1
Ele. Prin.	23	7	2

Of the administrators surveyed, thirty-seven indicated that provisions for inservice training in reading were made in the district. However, a breakdown of the "yes" answers seems to show a greater proportion of programs at the elementary level than at the secondary. Additional comments led to the conclusion that these are sporadic, vaguely defined "occurrences" rather than systematically planned district procedures. Three principals stated that inservice programs were available at the elementary level only; one comment, "If there is, it's minimal" was echoed

variously as "only for new programs," "not a yearly thing," "some," "not much," and a twice-voiced enigmatic, "not really." One superintendent heavily emphasized the fact that *provisions* for inservice training were made in the district, but left the impression that no further steps had been taken.

#### WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL BUDGET GOES FOR THE READING PROGRAM?

There is probably no area more indicative of priorities than the pocketbook, whether it be in individuals, businesses or schools. And, after all the administrative handbooks, curriculum guides, and teacher memos have been written, it all narrows down to one question: How much money will be spent?

##### *Percentage of Budget*

	0-5%	6-10%	15-30%	35-100%	Don't Know	No Answer
Supt.	2	0	1	0	1	2
Sec. Prin.	9	2	1	0	3	6
Ele. Prin.	1	0	15	9	2	5

Analysis of the answers to this question is particularly difficult due to the range of estimates and the extraordinarily large number of "no answer" and "I don't know" responses. Nineteen administrators were unable to answer; however, several indicated that they could not estimate because it was impossible to isolate costs of the reading program from the total budget. Elementary principals who did respond tended to group in the 15-30% bracket and comprised all but two of the seventeen responses there. The 0-5% choice received twelve of the total responses and was heavily weighted by secondary principals.

#### WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TIME SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO READING INSTRUCTION AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL?

This question was asked to discover whether or not administrators considered reading instruction in the primary grades to be sufficiently important to warrant special attention in the form of large time allotments.

##### *Percentage of Time*

	0-25%	25-50%	50-75%	75% +	No Answer
Sec. Prin.	0	3	0	3	0
Sec. Prin.	3	4	6	1	7
Ele. Prin.	3	14	12	3	0

Most administrators indicated a middle-of-the-road attitude toward the time allotment for reading instruction at the primary level. The 25-50% and 50-75% choices received thirty nine of the total responses, with the 25-50% choice showing a slight margin. Three elementary principals and three secondary principals indicated that reading instruction should receive no more than 25% of total instruction time in the primary grades, while seven administrators felt that it should receive 75% or more of the total

instruction time. Of these, one superintendent commented that "everything is taught with reading development." Interestingly, seven secondary principals had no opinion concerning the question, and one stated that the question was "not applicable" to him.

#### HOW MANY ACADEMIC HOURS HAVE YOU HAD IN READING?

This question was included in an effort to more clearly understand and interpret responses of the administrators; it was expected that greater training in the field of reading would lead to responses which would emphasize depth and scope of reading programs, and that little or no training would yield the opposite. The question was placed at the end of the survey to minimize any feelings of anxiety or threat which would cause administrators to answer questions defensively or attempt to make their responses "correct."

#### *Hours in Reading*

	None	2-6	7-12	13-15	16-20	21 +
Supt.	3	2	1	0	0	0
Sec. Prin.	13	6	0	1	1	0
Ele. Prin.	2	13	11	3	2	1

The responses here show a marked discrepancy between training received by elementary and secondary principals. Most noticeable is the fact that almost two-thirds of the secondary principals have had no classes in reading education, while three-fourths of the elementary principals have had between two and twelve hours. This discrepancy appears to be reflected, in at least a general sense, in the quality of answers on this survey. For the most part, elementary principals tended to give responses which were more empathetic toward, and knowledgeable about, reading programs than did secondary principals. When unusual or unknowledgeable responses were made, they were most often made by secondary principals.

#### Conclusions and New Questions

Especially encouraging was the high level of responses concerning goals, program components, and quality teaching. Somewhat more predictable, but none-the-less discouraging, was the tendency of administrators to confine their concept of reading programs to specific components, i.e., remedial reading, and the high number who were either unable to answer or were unwilling to emphasize reading through time or budget considerations.

One final question could be raised. Is it possible that only half the study has been done, that the answers given here would be of much greater significance if they were compared with answers given by reading specialists and classroom teachers?